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"Paralyzed, with Gold - ": Dickinson's Poetics of Photography

Dickinson's daguerreotyped image has gone through almost as many permutations as her edited writings, and as with these writings, the changes have been driven almost exclusively by an elusive search for authenticity. Dickinson's siblings, Austin and Lavinia, disliked her daguerreotype from the time it was taken in the winter/spring of 1846-47. Though the image has been "justly counted as one of the most important of all American photographs" and described as "haunting," Lavinia and Austin believed that it made their sister look plain, that it was "too solemn, too heavy" (qtd. in Bernhard 596-97, 598). Austin would "not hear of that portrait (daguerreotype) of Emily being used anywhere—on any account" (599). After the publication and immense popularity of two volumes of Dickinson's poetry in 1890 and 1891, the publishers sought out an image of the poet for the 1893 *Letters,* but had to settle for a painting of the Dickinson children executed when Emily was only nine. In 1897, Lavinia commissioned a Boston miniaturist to retouch a photograph of the original daguerreotype. This image, showing Emily with softer, wavier hair and a ruff collar, was published under the direction of Martha Dickinson Bianchi in the 1924 *The Life and Letters of Emily Dickinson*. But when Mabel Loomis Todd published a new edition of *Letters of Emily Dickinson* in 1931, the editor opted for relative authenticity, publishing a cabinet photograph based on the daguerreotype that she had taken in the 1890s and pronounced "dreadful." Finally, in 1945, Mabel Loomis Todd's daughter received the original daguerreotype, which had been thought lost, from a distant Dickinson relative. This "solemn" and "heavy" portrait is now the image most closely associated with Dickinson, but the search for other, more representative images of Dickinson continues.

In 2000, Philip Gura, Distinguished Professor of American Literature and Culture at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, bought an albumen photograph, allegedly of Emily Dickinson, on eBay for $481. Both the writing on the back of photo and the image itself have undergone extensive analysis, but the expert testing the new image against the old for cranial similarities was only able to confirm the impossibility of "exclud[ing] the individual in the suspect photograph" as Dickinson (Gura). In this issue of the *Emily Dickinson Journal,* George Gleason provides a full-scale analysis of the image, and based on provenance, condition and mounting, facial features, and a scrutiny of the other evaluations of the photograph, concludes that the image is not of Emily Dickinson.

This ongoing search for both an authentic and representative image reveals much about the power that photographs have held for their American audience in the one and a half centuries since Dickinson's original daguerreotype was taken. The assumption that a photograph leaves an authentic trace of its subject—what Roland Barthes calls the "That-has-been"—is an assumption that has haunted photography since its inception (77). Karen Halttunen and Alan Trachtenberg have both written extensively about photography's role in the antebellum cult of character, which saw moral nature as transparently visible through external signs. This belief, and pseudo-sciences like phrenology, granted photography powerful value as the preserver of a highly symbolic visible world. Both Judith Farr and Adam Frank have questioned Dickinson's subscription to this philosophy of physical revelation. Frank, in his incisive 2001 article "Emily Dickinson and Photography," suggests that to understand Dickinson's poetry as conditioned by the viewing of photography is to understand it as a poetics emerging in sync with a modern celebrity culture increasingly able to circulate mass-produced images of both the famous and the unknown in a public forum. From Frank's perspective, Dickinson's poetics are concerned with controlling the revelation of a private self—a self that Dickinson sees as only incompletely documented by the penetrating eye of photography—in a public space.[1]

This resistance, though compelling, forms only one side of Dickinson's poetic consideration of the medium. Dickinson, in her poetry and letters, looked at photography not only from the perspective of a visual consumer, but through her own aims as an artist. These were aims that the new capabilities of photography threw into relief. A contemporary dialogue saw photography—sometimes called "sun painting"—as a threat to the visual monopoly of traditional painting: more detailed, easier to produce, more affordable, and generally more suited to America's democratized spirit. Meanwhile, the Renaissance tradition of the

paragone, a debate between the merits of various art forms, viewed the "sister arts" of painting and poetry as natural rivals based on what were assumed to be each medium's fixed "natural" characteristics such as temporality and spatiality. These characteristics formulate the verbal as typically masculine—"an active, speaking, seeing subject"—and the visual as typically feminine—a "passive, seen, and (usually) silent object" (Mitchell 157). The act of looking at the art object hence becomes, in poetry that confronts the visual arts, "a struggle for dominance" (Heffernan 1); both James Heffernan and W. J. T. Mitchell claim this perspective as instrumental to ekphrastic poetry as a genre.

In Dickinson's poetry we see these competitive traditions converging, with results that show a modification of the traditional "paragonal" stance toward painting, and a surprisingly positive, even emulative stance toward photography (Heffernan 1). In Dickinson's poems, the categorical divisions that the *paragone* sets up—divisions that include gender, mode of representation, and geography—discount the representative capabilities of the traditional visual arts in relation to the verbal maneuvers of the poems themselves. The poems' larger dissatisfaction with the medium, however, seems to lie not in these standard "fixed" characteristics but in individual painters, and the emphasis that they place on mechanical technique and, implicitly, authorship. Photography, despite its dependence on mechanical devices, is figured in Dickinson's poetry as a means of evading this authorship and producing a more spontaneous image that eludes some of the limitations of human volition. This surrender of control is simultaneously threatening and fascinating; the poet's well-documented reticence toward the photographic distribution of her own image is thus in line with, rather than contradictory of, her seeming embrace of the characteristics of photography in her poems.[2] In Dickinson's paragonal schematic, photography becomes a middle term, a way of transcending the antagonisms that traditionally divide visual and verbal representation, and it ultimately provides a model for the poet's lyric voice. In this paper, I first examine a poem that demonstrates a competitive stance toward the visual arts, then look at some of the works most commonly discussed in accounts of Dickinson and photography, and end finally with a poem that contributes to this new conception of photography in Dickinson's canon.

"The Trees like Tassels - hit - and swung - " (Fr523), a poem that Franklin dates from spring 1863, takes a largely traditional paragonal perspective toward the visual arts while also placing emphasis on the role of the artist. The poem functions as a comparison of the verbal and visual media that focuses on some of the "fixed" characteristics of the *paragone* to highlight the superior expressivity of

Dickinson's own writing. Like Dickinson's other quasi-ekphrastic works, it does not focus on a particular artwork, but presents a poetic description of a scene, and culminates with a judgment of a painter's imagined depiction of this same scene. That the poem does name a particular artist, but not a particular artwork, contributes to the emphasis on authorship and authorial control.

The Trees like Tassels - hit - and swung -
There seemed to rise a Tune
From Miniature Creatures
Accompanying the Sun -

Far Psalteries of Summer -
Enamoring the Ear
They never yet did satisfy -
Remotest - when most fair

The Sun shone whole at intervals -
Then Half - then utter hid -
As if Himself were optional
And had Estates of Cloud

Sufficient to enfold Him
Eternally from view -
Except it were a whim of His
To let the Orchards grow -

A Bird sat careless on the fence -
One gossipped in the Lane
On silver matters charmed a Snake
Just winding round a stone -

Bright Flowers slit a Calyx
And[+] soared opon a stem]Or
Like Hindered Flags - Sweet hoisted -
With Spices - in the Hem -

'Twas more - I cannot mention -
How mean - to those that see -

Vandyke's Delineation
Of Nature's - Summer Day!
(Fr523)

Barton Levi St. Armand notes that this poem is for Dickinson "unusually long" (203), but in the context of the *paragone,* its length is integral to its meaning. The first six stanzas document the scene's "Summer Day" in a way that stresses not fixed imagery, but constant movement. The first two stanzas focus on the "rise" of the song of "Miniature Creatures." Because music, like poetry, exists in time rather than space, this is a movement that the poem can gesture toward recording. Similarly, the poem documents not the sun as a fixed image, but its movement in and out of its "Estates of Cloud." The beauty of this movement runs in striking contrast to Dickinson's characteristic depictions of full sunlight as jarring, aggressive and driven by material gain.[3] The partial cloudiness of this scene allows for the luxury of retreat, and the practical imperative "To let the Orchards grow - " seems only "optional," "a whim." The luxury of this willed growth has striking parallels to the "whim" of artistic creation, and it echoes the unfolding of Dickinson's own poem, which proceeds from object to object so haphazardly that Millicent Bingham has suggested that the first four stanzas constitute one poem, and the final three another (Franklin 531).[4] The poem's abrupt conclusion further underlines the impossibility of a logical ending. This open-endedness, along with the emphasis on movement and the poem's relative length, creates the sense of a dynamic, uncontained scene that poetry, but not traditional portrait or landscape painting, has the resources to suggest.

The next two stanzas continue to document movement, from the "winding" snake to the flower that "soared opon a stem," but the poem also stresses other senses that move beyond the representative abilities of painting. Poetry has traditionally been associated with voice and as such it has greater natural facility in recording the "Psalteries of Summer" than the visual arts.[5] The alliteration of "Trees," "Tassels" and "Tune" in the first two lines bolsters this sense. Similarly, the sense of smell, which poetry can allude to in a way that painting cannot, comes into play in the description of the flowers that "Sweet hoisted - / With Spices - in the Hem - ." Finally, the variant "Or," standing in for "And" in the lines "Bright Flowers slit a Calyx / And soared opon a stem," highlights language's ability to present different logical possibilities without having to choose between them. This is a function that any of Dickinson's variants arguably serves, but in presenting "Or" as a variant, Dickinson builds variation into the very text of the poem, as "soared opon a stem" stands poised to replace "slit a Calyx."

This emphasis on open-endedness, movement, and the senses beyond vision prepares readers to see the declaration in the final stanza of "How mean" is "Vandyke's Delineation / Of Nature's - Summer Day!" as competitive, its roots firmly in the paragonal tradition. Vandyke may in some sense stand in, as Judith Farr writes, "as a synonym, simply, for all painters" (259), but Vandyke's position in a seventeenth-century European tradition of courtly painting does serve to reinforce the poem's connection to the standard contrasts of the *paragone*. Furthermore, the naming of a specific artist carries some additional weight in a poem that lacks a specified artwork; in naming the visual image simply as "Vandyke's" the poem implies that the criticism of the work has more connection with authorship than with any particular canvas.

The word "Delineation" is likewise key in locating the poem's judgment of the work as "mean." "Delineation" figures the painter's depiction as a spare outline rather than a fully rendered image, a sense that contrasts strikingly with the animated, sensual scene of the previous six stanzas, whose excess spills into the final stanza ("'Twas more - I cannot mention - "). While both the painter's and the poet's scenes are incomplete, the poem is able to acknowledge its own limitations, and in so doing, to provide a sense of what lies beyond its boundaries. The phrasing also underlines the role of the artist, as unlike other related terms such as "image" or "picture," it encapsulates both the action and the end product of drawing. Apparent in "Delineation" is not just the resultant image, but the series of movements that lead to this image. The calculated nature of this visual image, we will see, plays as large a part in Dickinson's overarching critique of painterly depiction as the characteristics of the *paragone*.

Dickinson's correspondence provides a sense of the very different terms on which her relation to photography is predicated. An 1862 letter to Higginson in which she famously responds to his request for a photograph is cited in most discussions of Dickinson and photography as evidence for her knowledge of the medium's language and her resistance to its norms. The note begins abruptly: "Could you believe me - without? I had no portrait, now, but am small, like the Wren, and my Hair is bold, like the Chestnut Bur - and my eyes, like the Sherry in the Glass, that the Guest leaves - Would this do just as well?" (L268). Christopher Benfey reads this verbal portrait as "a little allegory of photography" not just because it functions as a substitute for an actual photograph, but because the last clause contains the sequence "eyes-glass-guest," with the first terms standing in for lens of the camera, and the last for the "ghost" or trace that an object "leaves" (204). The next lines, which explain the poet's notorious camera-shyness, hold up

to similar scrutiny: "It often alarms Father - He says Death might occur, and he has Molds of all the rest - but has no Mold of me, but I noticed the Quick wore off those things, in a few days, and forestall the dishonor" (L268). Here, "mold" stands in for both the daguerreotype and the process of decay, while "Quick" stands in for both the sheen on the surface of newly-minted daguerreotypes and human life. Dickinson's emphasis on photography's relation to death—its recording of the "ghost" and its existence as "mold"—provides a succinct explanation for the poet's notorious camera-shyness. This correspondence, then, shows both Edward Dickinson's conventional mid-century perspective on photography as a means of preserving life after death, and Emily Dickinson's opposing view of the medium as a death-in-life, a "dishonor" that she hopes to "forestall," but to which she will ultimately succumb. Unlike painting, which the previous poem faults for its calculated "Delineation," photography is threatening not because it is the product of a particular photographer or studio, but because it functions as a force of nature. This reticence toward the medium resonates with other accounts of Dickinson's personal attitude toward photography, but her poetry, while sharing in the sense of photography's danger, also capitalizes on the powers of revelation that the apparently uncalculated medium allows for.[6]

"The Soul's distinct connection" (Fr901), a poem from 1865 also frequently cited in discussions of Dickinson and photography, shows similar awareness of photographic language, and enables a more positive outlook on the medium's significance.

The Soul's distinct connection
With immortality
Is best disclosed by Danger
Or quick Calamity -

As Lightning on a Landscape
Exhibits⁺ Sheets of Place -]Developes
Not yet suspected⁺ - but for Flash⁺ -]still unsuspected]Fork
And Click⁺ - and Suddenness.]Bolt

(Fr901)

The words "quick," "Exhibits," "Flash," "Click," and the variant term "Developes" facilitate a reading of this poem as the record of both a natural and a scientific-artistic phenomenon. Contemporary connections between photography and lightning strengthen this connection; lightning was seen as capable of "photographing"

outlines onto natural objects, and was often regarded, like photography, as an amalgamation of the mystical and the scientific. Part of the medium's apparent mysticism lay in its revelatory power; in Oliver Wendell Holmes's words, "Conscience and nitrate of silver are telltales that never forget any tampering with them" (qtd. in Frank 10). Photography's role in this poem as a metaphor for a sudden spiritual epiphany is clearly more affirmative than the previous letter's emphasis on death-in-life. At the same time, the poem maintains some sense of photography's threat in its connection to the "Danger / or quick Calamity - " that brings about such a revelation. Photography here, as in Dickinson's letter to Higginson, is a force divorced from human volition; both the strength and the danger of the medium depend on this divorce.

This letter and poem also share the common ground of considering photography from the perspective of the visual consumer. They provide insight into the personal dangers and gains of photography, and it is with this insight that most discussions of Dickinson and photography conclude. Dickinson's poetry, however, considers photography not only as a record of an individual circulated among a viewing public, but also as an artistic event. In the context of Dickinson's paragonal confrontation of the visual arts, photography appears not merely as a visual product of human action, but also as a new player in the artistic competition.

"How the old Mountains drip with Sunset" (Fr327), a poem from early 1862, brings the vocabulary of artistic rivalry and photography together. To follow where this poem takes us is to see that Dickinson's vision of photographic modernity is rooted in the traditional oppositions of the *paragone* at the same time that it produces novel alternatives to these oppositions.

How the old Mountains drip with Sunset
How the Hemlocks burn -
How the Dun Brake is draped in Cinder
By the Wizard Sun -

How the old Steeples hand the Scarlet
Till the Ball is full -
Have I the lip of the Flamingo
That I dare to tell?

Then, how the Fire ebbs like Billows -
Touching all the Grass

With a departing - Sapphire - feature -
As a Duchess passed -

How a small Dusk crawls on the Village
Till the Houses blot
And the odd Flambeau, no men carry
Glimmer on the Street -

How it is Night - in Nest and Kennel -
And where was the Wood -
Just a Dome of Abyss is Bowing
Into Solitude -

These are the Visions flitted Guido -
Titian - never told -
Domenichino dropped his pencil -
Paralyzed, with Gold -

(Fr327)

This is one of Dickinson's many sunset poems, and as such it shares that basic characteristic—the study of an image created through light—that has brought critics to consider "The Soul's distinct connection" (Fr901) as photographic. At the same time, it is a very different poem from this later one. It is not concerned with the revelation of a concealed truth but with the paragonal competition between the narrative art of the poem, which unfolds in the first five stanzas, and the visual art of the poem, which stutters and freezes in the final stanza. This conventional poetic formula for poetry's relation to the visual arts is complicated by some distortions of the usual gendered and geographical traits of the comparison, as well as the introduction, toward the end of the poem, of photographic representation into the rivalry.

Like "The Trees like Tassels - hit - and swung - ," this poem follows some of the traditional techniques of the *paragone*, most obviously an emphasis on the temporal progression that the verbal arts allow. Here the speaker stresses the temporal in her detailed accounting of not a single but several moments in the sunset's progression, moments that are distinguished one from the other in the repeated use of "How" to introduce successive images. The active verbs ("drip," "burn," "ebbs," "crawls") place emphasis on the changing movement of the scene. In centering on this progression, the poem implicitly places itself in contrast to the more static depictions of the visual arts.

Gender, another mainstay of paragonal competition, also clearly makes its mark. Sexual characteristics are called into play in the poem by its focus on the sun, and more particularly the sunset. Wendy Barker writes that since "the sun has . . . traditionally been considered masculine," the binary of light and dark frequently seen in Dickinson's poetry represents the divide between the masculine and the feminine (4). Barker argues that Dickinson writes "from an awareness that, in the dominant imaginative outlets of . . . culture, the sun, God, masculine vigor and sexuality are all representative of each other" (21). These traditional connotations explain, for Barker, the threatening and abrasive qualities that scenes of full light often represent in Dickinson's poetry, as well as the creative power often seen in scenes of sunset. Dickinson's poems of both sunset and dawn subvert the "old, impossible binaries of light and dark by metaphorically creating her own 'Blaze' within the dark" (102); they are "examples of times when the sun's power is relaxed, lessened, but not absolutely absent from the earth, [and so they] allow the poet room for art . . . where she as poet can triumph" (103-4).

"How the old Mountains drip with Sunset" is a textbook example of the creative potential of the sun's descent, but it complicates the traditional gendered characteristics of the *paragone*. The sunset becomes a chance to exercise the speaker's ability to "dare to tell," and the detailed verbal accounting of the scene is evidence for her success. That the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian painters at the end of the poem "never told" the scene that the speaker records, however, pushes the paragonal stance of the poem in an unusual direction, as the male painters disrupt the tradition of associating the visual with femininity. In reversing this framework for the visual half of this opposition—and by extension, also positioning the verbal voice as feminine—Dickinson taps into a tradition of poetry that gives priority to verbal expression, while undoing the gendered associations that give priority to the male subject. The male painters in this scene, associated, as Barker would argue, with "the sun, God, [and] masculine vigor," are unable to represent the more subtle unfolding of the sunset. This notion of "masculine vigor" resonates strikingly with the previous poem's critique of structured control in the phrase "Vandyke's Delineation." Painting is the subject of Dickinson's critique not merely under the traditional terms of the *paragone,* but also following a notion of the limitations of the excessive authorial control that these poems associate with the (male-gendered) medium.

The upending of the gendered associations of the *paragone* is compounded with landscape characteristics in the speaker's record of the scene that are likewise at odds with this Western European tradition. The fading light of the scene calls

to mind the Hudson River Valley School of painting and its Northeast sunsets, images that dominated the mid-century American visual imagination to the extent that critic James Jackson Jarves pronounced a "virulent epidemic of sunsets" (qtd. in St. Armand 285). The Dickinsons, as several critics have noted, were complicit in this "epidemic"; Austin collected paintings from the School, and Dickinson's letters show a familiarity with the artists. The mountains and church steeples of the poem support the connection to the School, and so too does the more particular language. The Hemlock tree is native to North America and the flamingo—both bird and flower—to the Americas. Like early nineteenth-century landscape painting, this poem uses the age of the scene to create a sense of history and artistic heritage. Both the mountains and the steeples are "old"; the "Brake" (or fern) is among the most ancient plants; and the "Duchess" sun ties in to an aristocratic past. In contrast to this "old" American landscape, the painters hail, like the paragonal tradition, from Western Europe. Thus their inability to record the landscape is not just a gendered twist on the paragonal poem, but a geographical one, a usurping of this tradition for a statement of American artistic independence. Insofar as the painters' artistic paralysis is tied to its particular site, authorship—and the backgrounds that follow the names Guido, Titian, and Domenichino—stands in the way of expression rather than enabling it.

In the midst of this modified *paragone,* a third image, this one both photographic and anonymous, appears in the last stanza of the poem. The stanzas preceding this one rely on slant or eye rhymes (full/tell, Grass/passed, blot/Street), but in this final stanza the second and fourth lines come together in a perfect rhyme (told/Gold) that mimics the clear development of an image.[7] At the same time, the painters are not just unable to tell, but "Paralyzed, with Gold - ," frozen by the very light that they aim to depict. In becoming objects in the speaker's poem, these painters fall short in the match between text and image. But they also lose ground to a modern image, one that uses the power of a pinpoint of light—in this poem, the sun in a darkening sky—to create its frozen images. This poem thus frames two images: the speaker's image of the descending sun, and the final stanza's "photograph" of the painters. When light becomes the artist of the poem's final image, the painters find themselves frozen between the verbal narrative and the photographic image, unable to act against the strengths of either medium. The poem's characterization of these artists in the last line as "Paralyzed, with Gold - " encapsulates both the threat and the power of photography in Dickinson's repertoire. Paralysis signifies the painters' inability not just to manage the images that they would create, but also their own self-representations. Like Dickinson, who in her letter to Higginson

saw photography as an exchange of active life for a single death-like moment, the photograph here represents a loss of active power. What the painters gain lies in "Gold," a substance that, like photography, seems the translation of sunlight to a solid state. While threatening to its subjects, this "Gold" maintains the power to produce the very image—both material and valuable—that the painters failed to create.

If painting fails to constructively confront photography as a rival in this poem, poetry fares somewhat better. Poetry deals with the medium not by contrast, as it does painting, but in echoing its most basic characteristic, dependence on light. Proximity to light in this poem, as in "The Soul's distinct connection," has a direct connection to the speaker's ability to depict artistically. Light is seen as a force of destruction—burning and creating "Cinder"—but is primarily, as the last stanza establishes, a force of powerful creation. The most threatening image, or indeed non-image, of the poem is created not by light, but by its absence: "where was the Wood - / Just a Dome of Abyss is Bowing / Into Solitude - ." These lines in the penultimate stanza erase all of the images that the previous stanzas have painstakingly built up. As David Porter puts it, "Eye muscles will not bring into focus a 'Dome of Abyss' much less its 'Bowing into Solitude'" (146). In these lines, Dickinson "attempted to perceive the very process that produces the complicated experience of a felt world beyond the visible world" (Porter 146). This negation of the visual for the "felt world" is similarly seen in the non-image in which the "Houses blot" under the dusk; "blot," in connoting the erasure of writing as well as images, bolsters the connection between light and verbal representation. It is darkness, not light, that presents the greatest threat to the speaker's ability to depict with clarity.

A proper proximity to and distance from light is essential to what is perhaps the poem's strangest image. When the speaker asks in the second stanza, "Have I the lip of the Flamingo / that I dare to tell," the immediate grounding for the image is color, linking back to the "Scarlet" sun of the previous lines. The flamingo echoes the color of the scene's light, but is nonetheless a foreign tropical figure in the landscape of hemlocks and mountains. This dual pull into and out of the scene represents the balance the speaker requires to "dare to tell" the scene, a balance that the painters, in becoming "Paralyzed, with Gold - ," or entirely immersed in the scene, lose. The word "flitted" in the last stanza appears as a tangible sign of this loss: the word modifies both "Guido" (in the sense of "empty-headed") and "the Visions" (in the sense of "moving"). Attaining the proper distance to the setting of representation is vital to the poem's sense of artistic integrity.

Artistic distance and proximity, similarly, are key to contemporary conceptions of photography's strength. Photography was understood in its earliest days as an impersonal force for documenting nature, at the same time as its effects on viewers were anything but distanced. Photography, as "the pencil of nature," was a force which could create itself, automatically and naturally, without the interference of human subjectivity.[8] At the same time, the "artificial retina" of photography, so impersonally produced, had a powerful emotional effect on viewers (Holmes 14). The consistent demand for postmortem portraits contributed to the sense of photography as sentimental souvenir, but as Dickinson's letter to Higginson attests, even photographs of the living were seen as tokens to curtail emotional decay. Photographs, with the power to image beloved scenes and people memorably, were, as Holmes termed them, "the sentimental 'greenbacks' of civilization" (qtd. in Taft 143).

Dickinson's verse echoes this simultaneous distance and proximity in its own relation to lyric voice. Virginia Jackson has written eloquently of Dickinson's twentieth-century role as a "representative of the lyric," a figure whose secluded life and resistance to publication have answered perfectly to, and indeed have helped to create, modern conceptions of the poet and of poetry (*Dickinson's Misery* 92). The privacy of Dickinson's voice is precisely what has allowed for our sense of her universality, her transcendence of the individual.[9] At the same time, biographical interest in the poet has never waned, and her private letters have been the subject of more scrutiny than perhaps any other American writer. Such interest cannot but influence readings of her texts; as Jackson writes, "[t]he truth is that we know too much about 'Emily Dickinson'—poet, recluse, Myth of Amherst—to be able to imagine her 'Orthography' as anything stranger (or more historically distant) than the traces of a subject who will already have been remembered" ("Faith in Anatomy" 87). If Dickinson is consistently disembodied, she is also always on the verge of being re-embodied, re-created for another generation of scholars.

A late, much-quoted passage from the July 1852 letter to Higginson confronts this apparent conflict, as Dickinson, after furnishing her photographically-inspired verbal self-portrait, writes: "When I state myself, as the Representative of the Verse - it does not mean - me - but a supposed person" (L268). The same letter that models its verbal portrait on the photographic in the image of "the Sherry in the Glass, that the Guest leaves" also taps into photography's sense of artistic distance, the separation between the creator of the image and the image itself. If we see Dickinson's verse as "photographic," a resistance to pure subjectivity, to the seamless equation of the lyric "I" and the poet's self, must be a part of our sense

of what constitutes photographic language. This resistance to authorship was precisely the promise that photography, at this early point in its history, seemed to hold out, and which painting, irrevocably linked to the individual artist, could not offer.

In this light, it is ironic that the photos of Dickinson herself have become such a point of public speculation. That these images be unaltered—the records of a natural moment rather than the choice of an individual photographer—has, at least since Mabel Loomis Todd's decision to publish the "dreadful" cabinet photograph in 1931, defined our sense of the purpose that these historical photographs should serve. What attracted Dickinson to and repulsed her from the medium was precisely this natural authenticity—an authenticity that entailed a lack of control both on the part of the image's author and its subject. Lavinia's later manipulations of Emily's image undermined this authenticity in the service of a sort of poetic authenticity, but could not, of course, grant Dickinson herself the control that she was so aware would be sacrificed to the medium. The momentary revelation that these images grant us of Dickinson, though, is perhaps not what she would have feared. Few would argue that Dickinson's single authoritative portrait—termed alternately "solemn" and "plain"—is more revelatory or memorable than the poet's composite (wren-chestnut-sherry) self-portrait. The possibility of photography's banality is not one that we can expect Dickinson, locked in a moment of the medium's mysticism, to have anticipated. But the consequences of history are that the very images that Dickinson feared would reveal too much or unveil a truth "not yet suspected," often read to twenty-first-century viewers as exercises in the conventions of portraiture, images whose personal markers are exceedingly faint. Thus the difficulty with procuring a positive identification of the much-debated Gura photograph works to show us, if nothing else, just how much photography is capable of hiding from revelation.

Notes

I presented an earlier version of this article on a panel for the Emily Dickinson International Society at the 2008 MLA Convention, and I would like to thank participants for their helpful feedback. I would also like to acknowledge Louise Barnett and Sara Blair, who commented on this work in its inception, and Korey Jackson, who read the later versions.

1. More recently, Marta Werner has contributed to this dialogue with her article "'For Flash and Click and Suddenness'—Emily Dickinson and the Photography-Effect," which presents an analysis of both the original image of Dickinson, and the daguerreotype later discovered by Philip Gura. Her website, *"The Soul's Distinct Connection - ,"* also provides a valuable resource to scholars and students of early photography, compiling not only the Dickinson texts that have been the focus of discussions of the poet and photography, but also a gallery of nineteenth-century daguerreotypes and excerpts of nineteenth-century writings on the medium.
2. More than a century later in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Roland Barthes comments on this dual nature of the medium, its ability to take advantage of both emotional distance and proximity. For Barthes, the photograph's emotional power comes as a direct result of the impersonality of its creation. The unique intensity of the medium lies in its *punctum* or "wound" (73), the touching but seemingly inconsequential detail that only a mechanized medium such as photography is likely to reproduce; Barthes's *punctum* ranges in the course of his text to include a girl's "finger bandage" (51), "one child's bad teeth" (45), a woman's "strapped pumps" (43). For reasons that again tie in to physical distance and emotional proximity, Barthes also argues that we see the symbol of photography not as the camera obscura, an instrument that projects an image directly onto a flat surface, but as the camera lucida, a drawing instrument that forced "one eye on the model, the other on the paper" (106). This earlier instrument is a fitting metaphor for the essence of Barthes's photograph because it allows us to understand the image as "altogether outside, without intimacy, and yet more inaccessible and mysterious than the thought of the innermost being . . . having the absence-as-presence which constitutes that lure and fascination of the Sirens" (Blanchot, qtd. in Barthes 106).
3. Judith Farr notes that many of Dickinson's poems privilege sunrise and sunset as "evidence of sublimity" and that daylight is associated with "the noise and triviality of shared community" (52). See for instance "To interrupt His Yellow Plan" (Fr622) or "After the Sun comes out" (Fr1127).
4. There is little evidence in the fascicles to support this suggestion. Though a page break does divide the poem before the line "A Bird sat careless on the fence - " (Fr523), the manuscript shows a line of termination only after the seventh stanza.
5. See for instance Susan Stewart's *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (107-43).
6. See, for instance, an earlier letter of Dickinson's, written after receiving a photograph of a deceased friend: "Again - I thank you for the face - her memory did not need - " (L246).
7. Thanks to Phebe Jensen for suggesting this reading.
8. This phrase—"pencil of nature"—comes into circulation through Henry Fox Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature* (1844), the first photographically illustrated book to be commercially released (Maley). This conception of photography was reinforced by many of its early practitioners. Those who developed the process were "men of considerable scientific and mechanical ability" while its most frequent practitioners in the 1840s and 1850s were "business folk" of various types, often "men of poor talents" who took on daguerreotypy as a side-business (Taft 47-48). In both groups, technical ability was much more valued than artistry.

9. An early reviewer, for instance, praises "[t]he freedom and fullness of verse written only as expression of inward thought . . . indefinable as the song of a wild bird that sings out of the fullness of its heart" (qtd. in *Dickinson's Misery* 128).

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